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SOURCE Ethnos.

GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH ACTIVITIES
IN THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST

The Athens newspapers Ethnos has published two series of articles on the activities of the Greek Orthodox churches in the Near and Middle East. One series, by Dinos Koutsoumis, the paper's Jerusalem correspondent, deals with the difficulties and problems confronting the Greek Orthodox Church and its laity. It also touches on Soviet attempts to infiltrate the Church and through it, the Middle East.

The other series, written by Ap. V. Daskalakis, Professor of the University of Athens, is concerned with the concentrated infiltration attempts of the Soviet Union into the Greek Orthodox Church of the Near and Middle East. The following report is a summary of the articles by the two correspondents.

Numbers in parentheses refer to appended sources.⁷

D. Koutsoumis wrote that the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem is at present in the grip of a great crisis and is in great need of funds to safeguard the holy shrines for the Greek Orthodox Church. He added that the number of clerics there must be increased to 200, because at present, there are only about 100 monks, and the majority of these are quite old. Moreover, many of the shrines and monasteries are already without monks. On the other hand, he continued, the other religious sects have an estimated 3,000 clerics in Jerusalem ostensibly to maintain their own places of worship, but actually to wait until the time is ripe for them to take over the Brotherhood's property.

25X1A

25X1A

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Archimandrite Palladios, chief secretary of the Patriarchate, pointed out to Koutsoumis Greek that Catholics, the Roman Catholics, and the Russian Orthodox were building shrines only to make themselves know, adding that "it is a sort of competition they are showing us."

Koutsoumis stated that a foreign cleric in Jerusalem frankly told I. Moshopoulos, Greek Consul General in Jerusalem, "We have no need to make war against your Patriarchate... A fortress falls of itself when its defenders are absent...."

In this connection, Koutsoumis said that a Greek deputy and former minister has expressed the idea that a law should be constituted by the Greek government, following agreement with the Church, which would obligate the Church's higher clerics to live in Jerusalem for 5 years. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem, according to Koutsoumis, doing everything it could to alleviate the situation, had brought clerics from Greece, but they had not been able to endure the privations of life there and had left. He added that the founding of a theological school is now being contemplated, and a nucleus is to be formed out of students from Greece and others from Palestine. He said, however, that the project will not produce results for at least 10 to 15 years.

Koutsoumis pointed out that the enormous strength of Catholicism, together with its offshoots, which is fighting in Jerusalem against Greek Orthodoxy, must also be taken into consideration. He added that Catholicism has abundant financial resources, scientists, artists, and clergy who can be mobilized to strengthen the Vatican's struggle. According to Koutsoumis, it is a sort of "hot war," which is not immediately discernible. He said that attacks such as the recent attempt of the Catholics to appropriate privileges at Bethlehem are still to be confronted, even though that particular attempt failed.(1)

Koutsoumis also wrote about the problems of the Greek community in Jerusalem, stating that the Patriarch of Jerusalem is leading the struggle to maintain that community in the city. According to the correspondent, the numbers of the community have decreased alarmingly, particularly since the Jews entered the city. The Greeks, he continued, feeling that the Christian always finds protection with the Arab, left behind their business establishments, occupations, enterprises, and fortunes, which were, to a great extent, in the new city, and took refuge in Arab Jerusalem. He added that the Patriarchate went to their aid, even making available to them the little cubicles used by the monks for hundreds of years. The Patriarchate is still caring for some of these refugees, whose numbers also include Arabs and Turks.

Koutsoumis stated that the Greeks are much concerned over the fortunes they left in the new city: the Israeli government has sequestered these fortunes. Consul General Moshopoulos, according to Koutsoumis, has said that the matter will be solved when the general problem of Jerusalem is settled.

The correspondent pointed out that at one time, there were 2,500 Greeks in Palestine; now the number has fallen to 450. He said that two attempts have been made to establish a Greek colony in Jerusalem, but both were frustrated. According to this correspondent, the number of pupils attending the Greek school in Jerusalem has fallen to 30. The young men there are gradually leaving for Australia.(2)

Koutsoumis stated that the Soviet Union is quietly but systematically carrying out a plan for the conquest of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

- 2 -

RESTRICTED

25X1A

RESTRICTED

According to the correspondent, the Soviet plan began to take shape even before Aleksey was installed as Patriarch of Moscow. He pointed out that all the Patriarchs and religious leaders of the Middle East churches had been invited to Moscow to attend the ceremony of his installation as Patriarch. He said that these religious leaders were surprised to hear that the Soviet Union was willing to return to the churches all their expropriated fortunes. Koutsoumis added, "they could not know that behind this move was hidden the new Soviet plan for the Middle East." (3)

Koutsoumis pointed out that this plan, labeled Stavros (Cross), was formulated in the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs Section for Religion and is the basis for all the infiltration work now being carried out by the Russian Orthodox Church on behalf of the Soviet Union.

Later, Koutsoumis added, during a Moscow meeting which was attended by representatives of all the Orthodox churches, the first contact was made between Moscow and the Patriarchate of Antioch. Aleksey, according to the writer, promised the Patriarch that the Soviet government would assist him materially if he would agree to enter into "official relations" with the Patriarchate of Moscow. Koutsoumis went on to say that the Antioch Patriarchate, whose laity is composed mostly of Arabs rather than Greeks, is very poor. Therefore, he added, when Daniel Solov was appointed Soviet Minister to Damascus and Beirut, two churches in Moscow were returned to the jurisdiction of the Antioch Patriarchate. Also, according to information picked up by Koutsoumis in Jerusalem, the Soviet government has so far given 3,000 pounds to the Antioch Patriarchate. Koutsoumis stated that the Patriarch of Antioch has sent Vasileios Samahas, his confidant, as his representative to Moscow.

According to the correspondent, all these events have given rise to claims that the Antioch Patriarchate has submitted to Soviet influence, that delegates from Moscow have access to this old religious center and that, sooner or later, the Patriarchate will be completely lost to the Greek Church. Koutsoumis went on to say that "to admit, however, that the Patriarchate of Antioch has been completely subjugated to Moscow would be an unjust criticism against its Patriarch. Perhaps, economic reasons have forced the Patriarch to make certain concessions. In this connection, Archbishop Makarios of Cyprus, who talked with the Patriarch of Antioch recently, stated that the situation was not quite as bad as presented by the irreconcilable critics of the Patriarch of Antioch." (4)

In connection with the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Koutsoumis stated that two clerics, the Archimandrites Leonid and Vladimir, were sent by Moscow to Jerusalem. These two men, he added, were later recalled, and the 30-year-old Archimandrite Polykarpos was sent in their stead. He said that the Archimandrite was a member of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union and had immense sums at his disposal. The correspondent said that the Archimandrite traveled about Palestine, visiting the various abbeys helping the monks, and talking to them about continuing the church policies of Czarist Russia.

Later, Koutsoumis continued, the Archimandrite received help from two men, Ivan Ivanovich Zaytsev /Saitsev?/ and Koharof Kalougen /Komarov-Kalugin?/, sent by the Kremlin. The Kremlin's plan according to Koutsoumis, was to separate the Arab Orthodox laity, which numbers 15,000 communicants, from the Patriarchate of Jerusalem so that the Patriarch would eventually be forced to ask Moscow for economic aid.

The first step in this plan, continued the correspondent, was the revival of the Palestine Society, whose agents are now visiting the homes of the Arab Orthodox, dispensing material or medical aid and thus propagandizing for the Soviet Union. (3) Daskalakis pointed out in his article that the society has

- 3 -

RESTRICTED

25X1A

RESTRICTED

great financial means. He added that old Russian monasteries which had become deserted and had fallen into ruin have been restored and staffed by young monks sent from Moscow. These monks, according to Daskalakis, are also working to re-establish the old Czarist Russian prestige and to proselytize the Greek and Arab clerics in the holy places to Soviet views.(5)

Koutsoumis pointed out that the Palestine Society is also trying to regain the estates it possessed in Palestine during the Czarist regime. The Israeli government, he stated, has relegated the issue to the courts, which will decide to what extent the claim of Pavel Segeyev, Soviet Minister in Tel Aviv, is justified. He states that the old society, organized by the Czar, is the same as the present one of the Kremlin.

In the meantime, according to Koutsoumis, reliable sources state that Soviet propaganda is making surprising gains in Galilee. He said that an assembly against the Greek Patriarchate was held last July in Nazareth, capital of the province. The assembly was the first outward Soviet manifestation against the Patriarchate, according to the correspondent. Characteristically, Koutsoumis continued, the first proposals made at this assembly were (a) the separation of the Arab Orthodox laity in Israel from the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and its adherence to the Patriarchate of Antioch; and (b) the adherence of the latter's laity to the Patriarchate of Moscow.

The correspondent pointed out that despite gifts of various kinds and tempting offers to the Orthodox clerics, none have as yet yielded to the Soviets.(3) However, Daskalakis stated in his article that the idea that the estates owned in Russia by the Middle East Greek Orthodox Patriarchates during the time of the Czars might be returned has been encouraged by Soviet diplomats in their attempts to proselytize the Orthodox clergy. The latter have maintained the hope that the estates would be returned or that the Church would at least receive considerable compensation for their loss.

Daskalakis added that the Patriarch of Alexandria recently described as groundless the fears expressed about the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church in behalf of Soviet plans for the Near East. The Patriarch maintained that the Russian Orthodox Church was "moving and acting completely within the framework of Christian principles, independent of the Soviet government, being exclusively interested in reviving the old Christian conscience of the Soviet people without serving political aims."(1)

Daskalakis stated that the tendency of the Alexandria and the Antioch Patriarchates to present the Russian Church as independent of the Soviet Union is not justified by events. He said that the Russian Church fought to secure a position for the Soviet consul on the advisory council of the Ambeteios School, a large Greek school in Cairo, on the basis of an old provision in the school's organization plan. In this way, he said, the church would be able gradually to transform the school into an Arab-speaking one and into an organ of Soviet propaganda. Through promises of a subsidy to the Patriarchate of Alexandria, in lieu of compensation for the loss of its ~~expropriated~~ estates in the Soviet Union, the Russian Church, according to the writer, is attempting to proselytize the Arab clergy in Syria and Lebanon, where because of the political systems, the clergy exercises some political influence. "If further proof is needed," concluded Koutsoumis, "one need only read the variety of material printed in French and English over the signature of Russian Church leaders, which has been distributed throughout Europe. All these writings adhere to the Communist line of peace in the world, the serious threat of war, warmongers, and the contrast in the People's Democracies, where everyone works for peace in accordance with the will of God and Christian principles."(5)

- 4 -

RESTRICTED

25X1A

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SOURCES

1. Athens, Ethnos, 3 Oct 52
2. Ibid., 4 Oct 52
3. Ibid., 7 Oct 52
4. Ibid., 10 Oct 52
5. Ibid., 9 Oct 52

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- 5 -

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